The Future of St. James's

A Statement made on

Sunday, December 20, 1925

In St. James's Church, Philadelphia

by

The Reverend John Mockridge, Rector

THE STATEMENT is printed as delivered and is sent to you for quiet reading and study.

It is obvious that only chief points could be touched, and they very briefly, in the time allotted to an address at a Sunday service: and it is important that each member of the congregation should have the fullest possible information. To provide this I propose to send you a letter each week for 5 or 6 weeks. The Statement and the letters will set the whole matter before you.

There is to be no hurried or hasty action. Full time for careful and prayerful consideration must be given. What has been done so far is that the Rector and Vestry have made some decisions and announced a policy. We shall proceed "without haste and without rest," praying for God's guidance every step of the way.

The Future of St. James's

There are in the life of every institution moments of high and special importance. I can think of three such moments in the history of St. James's:

1. When under that great Christian leader, Bishop William White, the Vestry of the United Parish of Christ Church and St. Peter's decided to found a third Church to be called St. James's. This was in 1806.

2. In 1829 when, by mutual agreement, St. James's became a separate Parish with a State Charter granted to the "Rector, Church Wardens and Vestrymen of St. James's Church, Philadelphia."

3. When in 1869 the old Church at Seventh and Commerce Streets was sold and the present Church built at Twenty-second and Walnut Streets.

I think this morning marks a fourth of these high points, for it is my duty to lay before you certain facts and factors in our present situation and to announce to you a policy for the future of the Church which, when put into operation, will mark an epoch in our history as distinctly as did the other three.

There are two sets of facts:

1. St. James's has always been a "Parish" Church. This does not mean a Church with a definite geographical district: there are no such districts in Philadelphia. It means a Church run by and for the benefit of its pewholders and supporters—a family Church.

Until a few years ago this neighborhood was filled with the houses of wealthy or well-to-do people who rented our pews and filled them twice on Sunday. These people are here no longer. A few still keep town houses and live in them for a short time in the winter. These keep also a traditional or sentimental connection with their town Church as do some who live altogether in the suburbs: but the number of them is small and is diminishing.

St. James's has always been a prominent Church, accustomed to conduct its affairs on a scale commensurate with its importance. It has a certain recognized prestige. It maintains a high standard of worship and work which it does not wish to lower, but finds increasingly difficult to keep up. Its regular congregations are decreasing; its pew rents are steadily diminishing; its finances are straitened.

That is, briefly, the first set of facts. They indicate plainly enough that St. James's is failing: as a "Parish" Church its days are numbered.

2. The second set of facts is different. The population of this vicinity is not decreasing, it is growing. It has been demonstrated over and over again that large numbers of people can be brought to St. James's for special services on any day and at any hour. For eleven years in succession the Church has been crowded on Ascension Day. Three weeks ago it was filled with people on a Saturday at 12 o'clock. In the last 10 years a large number of special services of all sorts and kinds has been held on Sundays, Holy Days and weekdays. Not one of these has ever been a failure. Most of them have been outstanding successes and have attracted wide attention. Their success moreover, cannot be disconnected from the fact that whereas in 1915 one hundred and ten people made pledged gifts to St. James's and its causes amounting to $10,000; in 1925, three hundred and ninety people are making pledged gifts amounting to $30,000: a result that becomes all the more striking when it is remembered that every year losses due to deaths and removals have had to be made up. In one year these losses were $6000, and in no year have they been less than $3000.

Definite religious results traceable directly to contacts made through these services are on record and are as great as our discontinuous efforts deserve.

You see the problem. On one hand are indubitable evidences of decay: on the other, evidences no less plain of something not in the least like decay. With this twofold problem we, who are your officers and trustees, have been dealing for many months. I wish here to bear public testimony to the diligence and large-mindedness with which the gentlemen of the Vestry have given themselves to their task; and above all to the entire harmony with which they have sought a solution, a harmony which is by no means the least valuable asset of this Church.

Possible solutions are three:

1. We may sell our property and move to some other location.

2. We may amalgamate with some other Parish.

3. We may stay where we are and try to meet changed conditions by adopting new methods. All three of these have been given full, careful and most serious consideration. Each has points in its favor, but as this statement must be kept within limits I shall say only that with complete unanimity and by formal resolution it is the third possibility that has been adopted.

I have said that St. James's has always been a "Parish" Church and I have defined a Parish Church as a Church run by and for the benefit of its supporters. St. James's has been this kind of Church for 116 years. It is the only kind of Church most of us know anything about and it is, therefore, entirely natural that we should be thinking about St. James's as a Parish Church.

There is, however, another sort of Church altogether, born out of just such conditions as now face us. It is a Church run for the glory of God and the public good by those who, as Christians and Churchmen, believe that God must not be left without strong witness in the heart of a great city. It is run on a scale commensurate with its opportunity. It is a "free" Church, which means simply that it has no rented pews. Its services are designed to meet the needs of all sorts and conditions of men. It carries on an aggressive Christian propaganda, using all modern and effective methods of publicity. It is a great missionary centre, using that word in its widest sense. It cannot be financed by the current gifts of those who attend it; such gifts must be supplemented by endowment income or in some other way. It has definite religious value. It forces the worship of God and the teaching of religion upon the attention of the public. It establishes contacts and brings many to baptism, to confirmation, and to growing interest in the Christian life.

Now, we who are your leaders, trustees of this tradition and of this property, have come to believe that St. James's with its long and honorable history as a Parish Church can now so arrange its affairs as to meet the changed conditions aggressively and strongly as a "City Church" on the lines that have just been described. Run on these lines St. James's will once more blaze a trail. There is need for such a Church in central Philadelphia and no such Church at present exists. It is certain that the first one of our central city Churches that has the vision, the courage and the financial ability to run thus "wide open" *has a very great opportunity* at hand. Having reached this belief the Vestry determined to consider whether or not as a practical matter there is any real chance of setting St. James's on its way to meet the new day as a city Church strongly founded and well equipped for its task.

The financial factors are these. There is at present an endowment income of about $4000 a year. The experience of several years shows that we can count on $18,000 a year from current gifts for Parish maintenance from our System for Offerings and other

sources. Pew Rents bring in at present a little less than $13,000 and this source of income is steadily decreasing; in 15 years it has decreased nearly 50 per cent.

It is this Pew Rent income that we must first consider; and I know that here I touch on a subject as to which there are different opinions. What I ask is that you of the congregation will show in your thinking about it the same open-mindedness which has led the Vestry unanimously to the conclusion that for the full carrying out of our new policy, the Pew Rent system must be abandoned. The system is a carry-over from the days of the family Church, the Church of the privileged few. It has been abandoned by all but seven per cent. of the Episcopal Churches in this country; and an undue proportion of the Churches making up the seven per cent. are in Philadelphia.

Under the conditions which now face us, and human nature being what it is, no Church has a chance to succeed as a City Church, unless all its seats are "free." The sort of people we now have the chance to reach effectively will not rent pews, nor will they permanently occupy "free" seats unless all seats are "free." In planning St. James's future, therefore, we have had to calculate our finances without Pew Rent income; in other words, taking the annual minimum cost of running St. James's on the new plan at $35,000, we find ourselves with predictable income of $22,000. Where is the other $13,000 to come from? This question has led us to consider our assets, especially our real estate and buildings. We own two parcels of land, Twenty-second and Walnut Streets (about 20,000 square feet) and the Sansom Street property (about 9000 square feet). On the Sansom Street property is the Henry J. Morton Guild House. This building was erected 35 years ago by the congregation as a memorial to the long Rectorship of the Rev. Dr. Morton. At that time the Episcopal Church all over the country was waking up to the need of what has since become known as "Social Service," and has forgotten that it owes its inception to the Church. Our Guild House has had a remarkable record in this work. The Boys' Evening Home Association; The National League of Business Women's Clubs; the Manual Training Movement, now a part of public school education, all had their origin and start in our Guild House as Parish works. Whitford Lodge was once the summer place of a girls' club here. The Reed Street Neighborhood House was built and endowed by St. James's people. But, as has happened so often before, the Church having inspired and started such work, sees it pass over into the general public conscience, and her own share in it decrease. Parish Houses on a large scale are no longer built in great cities. They are not needed. Ten years ago, when I came to St. James's it was a shock to discover that the building of which I had heard for many years was empty, dark, unused. It is not so now. It is in daily use in a variety of ways, by a very large number of people, but the work that goes on in it is almost entirely "Community Work"—valuable and worthy of support where resources permit, but in such circumstances as now face us, a serious and questionable drain.

The sale of this property at this time seems wise and necessary. Its value is considerable. Its sale will relieve us of some expense. We should have to put in a new heating plant in the Church and rearrange our remaining buildings for parochial use, carefully maintaining them as a memorial to Dr. Morton.

I read in the papers the other day that St. Paul's Church, Richmond, Virginia, one of the oldest and most conservative Churches in the South, had abandoned the Pew Rent System and that all the pewholders had agreed to contribute the amount of their pew rent through the envelope system. Here at St. James's we feel safe in counting on $5000 a year given by those now renting pews who will see the vision of what St. James's can do under the new plan, and are willing to add what they now pay in Pew Rent to their System for Offerings gift. Thus we reach a point where the minimum cost of maintaining St. James's on the new plan ($35,000) is in sight except for $4000 or $5000.

At this point I wish to remind you of something easily forgotten, namely, that this beautiful Church was built by our fathers and was given to us. We of this generation from time to time have been enriching it with costly memorials; but we have received it as a free gift from those who went before us. All we have done is to maintain it. Is it too much to ask that we who have received this foundation in stone should now contribute towards the building of a foundation in money, so that we may hand on to our successors this noble Church with its long and honorable tradition strongly founded to meet the new demands and the new needs? Three years from now, in 1929, we shall keep the centenary of St. James's life as a separate independent Parish. It is proposed that between now and then the sum of $100,000 shall be given by the members of the congregation as an addition to its endowment fund. This is surely a most modest request and I shall be surprised if, when the situation is fully grasped and the opportunity realized, gifts much larger than this are not made. Here, however, as elsewhere in our financial conclusions we have taken the safe, conservative line, and we feel sure that the $100,000 will be raised and so the necessary amount of income provided.

I have now put before you all the chief points which have led the Vestry and myself to the conclusions we have reached. A good deal of what I have said, perhaps most of it, is on the basis of ordinary practical business calculation. We do well to consider all these elements, but we do ill if we forget that our plans and our actions are under the rule of a "juster Judge than here." It is God's work for which we are making plans; it is the interests of our holy religion we are considering. These are days of great religious unsettlement. The response that you and I make to the needs and opportunities of this Church at this time will be our witness to the value we set upon Christ's religion. To have the whole of our congregation with one voice carrying out the policy that has been outlined, will have its effect upon the whole cause of religion in this community. For it will be a declaration in unmistakable terms that we who are heirs and beneficiaries of a

great tradition and a noble Church are determined through that Church to carry the Christian Gospel to the multitudes of this great city. It is with all this in mind that I commend to your conscience and to your prayers, as well as to your minds, the careful consideration of this plan for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom.